



# The Seat with the Clearest View

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**Every time I pushed open the damp and rotting door to my bedsit, I cursed the part of me that had dreamed-up such a drab and utterly unpleasant abode.**

The fetid beige wallpaper - cast a sickly yellow thanks to the feeble lighting - was offset only by some nicotine-yellow net curtains and a prehistoric wood-panelled television set. It reminded me a bit of my room in my second-year student house at Uni, albeit with slightly less mould. The décor and the state of decay were certainly identical though.

I threw my leather jacket over the back of my lone chair and flicked on the television, smiling to myself as the static settled into the sharp, swarthy features of a vaguely familiar face. As a dashing smile broke above a precise, pointed beard, I realised that the face was that of the Master - *Doctor Who's* archenemy and cause of many a childhood nightmare. He was wearing his trademark high-necked black outfit, and his leather-clad hands were resting on rather a gothic-looking rail whilst some sort of half-man / half-ape creature (which looked suspiciously like Ray) lumbered about behind him.

'I remember this one,' I muttered as I sat myself down on the edge of my bed. 'Course I do,' I added quickly, my smile subsiding as once again I was reminded. 'Course I do.'

With a sudden flourish of anger I switched off the television, drew the curtains, and collapsed onto my rotten old bed, frantically trying to stir memories of home; *memories of the future*.

*Did the future ever happen?*

Eventually, just as it did every two or three days when the adrenaline and the dread had subsided, a less maddening form of sleep took hold of me.

I sat bolt upright in my bed; heart racing, sweat bucketing from my brow. Instinctively I ran the back of my hand across my forehead, and as I looked down at the beads of sweat glistening on my hand, it struck me. As it so often struck me.

*This isn't sweat; this isn't even real.*

*My heart isn't racing.*

*Am I even thinking, or am I just a puppet in a show?*

And I tried to look *through* my hand. I tried to make out the fine threads that bound my world together. And then I tried to see the world that sat behind it, ticking away. A world of colostomy bags and drip feeds; a world of *iPods* and miracles.

My name is Sam Tyler. I had an accident and I woke up in 1973. I had no idea if I was mad, in a coma, or back in time. It was like I'd woken up on a different planet, but I knew that if I could find the reason, then I could get home.

As time went by, I began to believe more and more that I was living a whole new life inside a coma; fighting in there to stay alive out here. I saw odd flashes of light and sound; experienced acute avalanches of taste. I heard voices from the outside; and when they messed up my medication, I felt it. And when I wet myself, I felt it. And when Maya said her goodbyes, man did I feel it.

And so I never seriously considered that I'd actually gone back in time. I mean, how could I have? Being haunted by the girl from the test card was one thing, and seeing myself as a character in *Camberwick Green* was quite another – but time travel? The whole idea was just insane.

And so you can imagine my surprise when *Doctor Who* climbed in through my bedroom window.

'No, seriously, I'm the Doctor; honest,' he said in his soft northern accent, hands held up placatingly.

I leaned forward and nursed my pregnant head in my hands. Even within my own soothing grasp, it shook involuntarily from side to side with sheer incredulity. This time my warped mind had gone too far.

Wrenching my head from my hands, I met his eyes. I was about to speak; about to make some sarky remark - purely for my own amusement, obviously - when I just thought "to hell with it". I laid back down on my bed, and stared straight up at the ceiling that I knew wasn't really there; my brain damage was the only real fence facing.

A second or two later and Christopher Eccleston's chaotically bearded face was hovering directly above me, grinning with just the slightest hint of mania.

‘Now then,’ he said, wiggling all five of the fingers on his right hand at me in some grotesque parody of a wave. ‘I realise this is probably gonna seem a bit weird, what with me apparently being the lead character in a best selling telly show and all that, but you need to listen sunshine; it’s not everyday the whole universe is at stake, y’know. Well, not for you and the Gene Jeanie anyway. Post offices and banks and that, *yep*; whole universes, *nope*.’

I sat up again, shrugging exaggeratedly. ‘Amaze me,’ I spat out, probably making some tetchy hand gesture as I did so.

‘Well for starters, I’m not who you think I am. Well... I mean... *I am...*’ he looked momentarily befuddled. ‘But who you think I am, isn’t who you *should* think I am. Yeah, that’s it.’ At this, the Doctor beamed, looking very pleased with himself.

‘And here’s me thinking that I’m *in need* of a Doctor,’ I quipped.

Another quick retort. Another bite of hollow backlash.

Against nothing.

‘Well that’s just it, see. I am *the* Doctor. As in *Doctor Who*. But I did that – *Doctor Who*, I mean. Brilliant, innit, by the way? Love the theme tune; took me ages. Still, worth it... Anyway, I had *Doctor Who* put in your head, to get you prepared. My TARDIS – you should know what that is, yeah? Big blue box; light on top; ridiculously large walk-in wardrobe, all that lot? - well it has these telepathic circuits. They get inside your head, and with just a little bit of jiggery-pokery, I got ‘em to overwrite your memories of some old telly programme from your childhood with the whole story of my life – past, present, future; *the lot*.’

‘So you’re saying that the TV show I watched as a kid; that *I saw* get relaunched last year, wasn’t *Doctor Who*?’

‘He’s got it! I needed a doorway into your life, see. A way to get through to you.’

‘So *I am* in a coma then! And you’re like, what? My Doctor from the real world? A proper Doctor?’ I clapped my hands and then pointed square at him, grinning.

‘You’re my surgeon, aren’t you? “*The Doctor!*” Talk about metaphor.’

The Doctor suddenly grabbed my cheeks and began to lug them about in all directions like an overzealous aunt. ‘Come on Sammy boy, you’re cleverer than that. You’re supposed to be the one spitting in the eyes of fools, not dribbling down himself.’

I slapped the Doctor’s roving hands away, my own hands leaping to my face defensively.

‘Hurts, does it?’ the Doctor grinned.

I stood up and wandered towards the window. The Doctor had made his point. I felt things here. Things hurt. And some things... Some things felt good. No; some things felt *right*.

The threadbare carpet – not to mention the occasional woodlouse - beneath my feet felt real. The spring showers that soaked me to the bone felt all too real. And, whether I liked it or not, the time travelling do-gooder that half an hour earlier I would’ve *sworn* I spend my childhood watching fight monsters on TV was starting to seem every bit as real.

I was alive - in some ways, more than I'd ever been.

*The future never happened...?*

'Say I believed you,' I said warily. 'What would you want with me? I'm just a detective. A *policeman*. I uphold the law.'

I turned back to see that the Doctor had rearranged my pillows and propped himself up against them on my bed. Stroking his unkempt beard, he looked at me – right at me – and his smile suddenly dissipated. For a moment he looked lethal.

'I know what you're going through here. It's like you've landed on another planet, and more than anything, you want to go home. I get that; I really get that.'

'See, long time ago there was this... um... *Thing*. I had a bit of a fall out with my lot, and I woke up in 1973. Least I think it was 1973; might have been '70... or even '75.' He waved his hands dismissively. 'I'm rubbish at years. Bit daft for a Time Lord, I know, but anyway, date doesn't matter. Thing is I *was* on a different planet. And I wanted to get home too.'

I smiled, brimming with derision on the inside. 'So we're kindred spirits!' I announced overdramatically. More irate hand gestures on my part. More funny faces.

The Doctor either didn't pick up on my contempt, or was far cleverer than I gave him credit for. 'Could say that, yeah. But it's more than that. I didn't just come here to tell you that I understand what you're going through, and that everything's gonna be alright, *blah-di-blah-di-blah*. I came to offer you a bit of perspective... and to ask you a bit of a favour.'

'Why would I want "perspective" from a character in a children's TV show?'

‘Oi! It’s family drama, I’ll have you know!’ The Doctor leapt to his feet, genuinely riled.

An argument with a fictitious figment. What was the use?

‘Now you might think you’re in a coma, but your ape-like brain can’t even begin to fathom the depths and the subtleties of existence. We live in universes that weave and flow through each other; cascading and imploding, growing inside each other’s pockets and looping the stinking loop!’

‘Huh? Parallel universes? What are you on about?’

‘Parallel? What are **you** on about? They’re about as far from parallel as you can get! Least, some of them are. Reality ebbs and flows. It’s fluid, see. Now whatever daft ideas you might have inside that thick skull of yours, add this one to the list:

‘I’m the Doctor. I’m an alien, and I walk through infinity while most folk just wade through a sunken dream. And of all the people that you could turn to for answers in this little old world of yours, I’ve got the clearest view by far. All this-’ he held out his arms wide in a melodramatic gesture. ‘All this, Sam Tyler, I’ve lived it before. And now I’m about to be live it again. Only this time, I need your help.’

The Doctor, with lightening speed and fierce strength, grabbed both of my hands and held them tight to his chest.

‘Still think I’m that bloke off *Shallow Grave* and *28 Days Later*?’

‘I... I...’ I struggled for words, but a couple of good ones kept spinning around in my head.

**Not real.**

'You're my creation, though. I mean... You wouldn't be *Doctor Who* without the double heartbeat, would you?'

'Just the Doctor, ta' he said, letting go of my hands, the iciness in his stare suddenly giving way to an almost hapless amicability. 'Now are you just gonna stand there all day with your jaw on the floor, or are you gonna help me save the universe?'

'Huh?' I spluttered, utterly lost for words. 'Save the universe? Me?'

'Yep,' the Doctor said curtly, nodding just the once as he did so.

'Is this it, then? Is that what it will take to get me home? 'cos I can't stay here forever, Doctor.'

'No,' the Doctor whispered, sadly. 'No you can't.'

'But... Why me? Is this why I'm here? Is that what all this is? Some weird-'

'More because... you will be... *there*.'

I looked at him, blankly.

'cos I *remember* you doing it, bone'ead. Bloody good job you did of it, too.'

'What did I... *Will I* do?'

'Save the Doctor, save the world.'

I scoffed. 'Nice catchphrase.'

'Thank you. So are you in or what, Sam Tyler?'

'You just tell me what I need to do to wake up, and I'll do it.'

'Your Hyde mate is nowhere to be seen, Tyler,' snorted my ever-antagonistic DCI, Gene Hunt, as he stared through his binoculars at the entrance to the old dance hall.

'He'll be here, Guv,' I assured him, looking around nervously. 'He'll be here.'

'Are my ears burnin'?' came a familiar twang, startlingly close.

'Enough of 'em to catch alight,' roared the burly, moustached figure of Detective Sergeant Ray Carling, elbowing his young protégé, Detective Constable Chris Skelton, as he did so, giving the youngster no option but to do the same.

'You reckon?' said the Doctor, looking genuinely hurt as he felt the shape of his ears, as if for the first time. 'Ah well, them's the breaks.' He grinned like a Cheshire cat. 'Now then Raymondo, any sign of the suspect?'

Carling took a long drag from his cigarette before using it to point towards the alleyway down by the dance hall. "'bout 'afe an 'our back, Magister and four o' these gret gorillas in sailor suits carried this glowin' triangle-thing down theer.'

'Fantastic! He's bang on schedule. And the Ogrons are already with him,' the Doctor mused, rubbing his hands together with excitement. 'You're brilliant, you are, Raymondo. You always were my favourite.'

'Poof,' scolded Carling, turning away from the Doctor, who had raised his eyebrows in mock astonishment. I couldn't help but smirk.

'What's the time, Tyler?' asked Hunt impatiently, before taking another swig from his flask.

'Ten minutes to go, Guv,' I replied. 'Sergeant Benton's team should be in place, and Annie with them.'

'Lord in Heaven help us,' sighed Hunt, taking yet another swig. 'I must be going soft in the head, letting a plonk go in there with that bleeding deigo blagger. If any harm comes to her, it's your head on the block, Dorothy. You remember that.'

'But it was your plan, Guv,' I protested.

'Your head on the block,' he repeated slowly as he peered through the binoculars again. 'Chris! Get tooled up and then get yerself down there to back up Benton and those grunts. I'm not having those UNIT fairies nicking all the credit for this one.'

'*Chris and Benton?*' I asked worriedly. 'Is that wise, Guv? I mean, they're both a bit-'

'Nonsense!' interjected the Doctor. 'Me and Jonny boy go back years. Least, we will do. He can look after himself, as daft as he seems. And your man.'

Hunt shook his head despairingly.

'He's good too, isn't he? Hunt, I mean,' enthused the Doctor, much too loudly. 'Look at me working for the Gene Jeanie! Who'd have thought it, ey? Me and the Manc Lion! Fantastic! I should have sorted all this out yonks ago, y'know. It was on my "to do list", a body or two back, but then-'

With what I felt was uncharacteristic restraint, Hunt simply shook his head and muttered something about "the \*\*\*\*\* Hyde \*\*\*\*\*."

\* \* \*

*This isn't blood. This isn't real.*

‘Sammy boy, wakey wakey’ coaxed the Doctor, slapping my cheeks this time as opposed to just generally molesting them.

I looked down at the dark patch of blood staining my shirt and, real or not, it was all I could do to stop myself screaming out in sheer terror.

Suddenly I recalled the ape-things lumbering towards me. Felt the burning in my chest.

***The future never happened.***

‘This isn’t blood. This isn’t real. This isn’t blood...’

The mantra of a madman.

‘I’m sorry Sam, but this *is* blood and this *is* about as real as it gets.’

‘Get me to a hospital... I need a...’ I started to laugh despite myself. ‘I need a Doctor.’

‘Less of that, laughing boy, I need a “Sam Tyler”, not a pain the you-know-what. And believe you me, if I need a “Sam Tyler”, the whole of creation needs a “Sam Tyler”.’

‘I can’t do it Doctor,’ I cried through gritted teeth. ‘Not with this...’

The Doctor pressed down hard on my wound, staring straight into my eyes, unblinking, as he did so. ‘Let me tell you something, Sam. I can hardly face myself in the mirror because of what I’ve done, and what I probably should or shouldn’t have done. To think of all the lives and all the worlds that I could’ve saved; that I *should’ve* saved... I wouldn’t wish this sort of guilt on anybody; especially not you.’

‘Suppose that explains the beard... And the hair...’ I mused, half-delirious. ‘Wasn’t like that on the telly...’

‘Sam Tyler, if you don’t do this, it’s not just your world that is gonna change, but this universe and every other. I can’t have died here; I had stuff to do. Stuff like saving the universe; week in, week out. If I die here, all of that’s undone. And all of that’s gonna be on you.’

‘S’alright for you...’ I slurred. ‘You can regenerate when you get...’ I laughed again, agonisingly. ‘When you get **zapped**.’

The Doctor looked offended. ‘Regenerate? You must be jokin’ mate. This body is practically clean on!’

‘Suppose that explains the beard... And the hair...’

‘Stop saying that! No, seriously though; please - lay off the facial hair. Why does everyone have a pop at the beard? After nine hundred odd years of having to shave every day, I’d have thought people’d let me-’

I cried out in pain, cutting off the Doctor mid-sentence.

‘Come on Sam,’ he coaxed. ‘I need you... This world needs you-’

‘I hate this \*\*\*\*\* world!’ I spat bitterly.

‘You won’t kid me, Sam Tyler,’ the Doctor said lightly. ‘You don’t hate everything about this place. She—’ he pointed behind him, towards the dance hall. ‘Her in there; Annie. **She** needs you. Now tell me you hate her.’

It was then. At that moment. I’d fought and I’d fought and I’d fought.

And I was sick of fighting.

‘This must be what it feels like to be mad,’ I sighed, tears welling up in my eyes.

'Tell me about it sunshine,' grinned the Doctor. 'Now are we gonna sit round here all day chin-waggin', or are you gonna save the world?'

He held out his hand.

'Anything for Annie...,' I said as the Doctor helped me to my feet. 'And anything for a *friend of the family*.'

The Doctor looked at me, a rare look of bafflement on his face.

' "Past, present, future; *the lot*," ' I quoted mockingly. 'I've seen your future, Doctor. Well... The next few episodes of it, anyway. Now who's got the seat with the clearest view?'

\* \* \*

The howl of gunfire and the zap of laser beams tore through the air as we made our way through the alleyway and round to the back of the dancehall. Arm in arm, we'd made it.

The Doctor disentangled himself from me and propped me up against the wall. I breathed in rapid, hard breaths, each of which sent an excruciating jolt through my whole body. As the pain grew, I found it harder and harder to believe that any of this was make-believe.

'I am **so** alive! I am **so** alive!' I yelled, almost with glee. It had taken a well-placed shot from a monkey-man's ray gun to help me truly feel alive again.

The Doctor looked at me. ‘Remember,’ he said. ‘Not until the Master says “saddening bore”. It has to be right on the mark, or I will’ve been a dead man, and we will not have been havin’ this conversation now. You got that?’

I nodded astutely. The Doctor turned to leave.

‘“Saddening bore,” ’ he repeated over his shoulder, pointing back at me and nodding.

‘Doctor,’ I cried after him, and when he looked back, I just shrugged and said ‘thanks,’ as if it was the answer to everything.

The Doctor regarded me sadly. ‘No. *Thank you*, Sam Tyler,’ he said, rounding on me with a sudden burst of energy. ‘Coming here... Seeing you. Remembering how it all was, back in the day. I usually have to try and avoid the here and now, see, ‘cos of him. Not that I minded; not at first, anyway.

‘I hated it, see, back in the olden days. Least, I thought I did. “Exile”, they called it. Thought it’d never end. But it will end. And all too soon.

‘And now, looking back, they were some of the best days of my lives. I was part of a family, Sam. Imagine me with a family! Fair dues, it was a bit of a dodgy one – all Brigadiers and blondes with bangles and rings. And Sergeant Benton, of course. But it was a family all the same.’

The Doctor scoffed. ‘Look at me, daft old sod, getting all nostalgic. Still, you make sure when you see him; when you see *me*, that is; you make sure you tell him... Tell him to stop wandering around with the face on, like he’s just sat on a flat spacehopper. Tell him to *live* it. And tell him to *love* it. Tell him to have a fantastic

exile! And you tell him that, when he does get to go home – and he will go home, one day – you tell him to make the most of it.'

He paused, presumably for effect.

'Because-'

The Doctor, the colour having drained from his face, opted not to finish the sentence. He just turned, and walked away. 'Just because.'

I sucked in one more breath and turned to face the doorway. As I pushed open the back door and prepared to make my heroic entrance, I heard the Doctor whisper 'Wonder if he'll ever know...'

I'm still not sure if he meant the old him, or me.

'Dreadfully sorry old chap but I can't do that,' said the old white-haired Doctor; the Doctor that I thought I'd grown up watching on television. The Doctor that I thought had been played by him off *Worzel Gummidge*.

The Master had got his bulbous - and shockingly phallic - weapon held against Annie's head, poised to shoot, when the old Doctor suddenly lunged for him with some sort of wild karate chop, emitting the craziest and most high-pitched of battle cries as he did so.

Unfortunately though, he'd mistimed his move, and the Master's weapon was now aimed squarely between his eyes, so close to his head that it was practically touching it.

'You really are a saddening bore, my dear Doc-'

That was my cue.

*'In like flint...'* I muttered to myself.

### **SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW**

'...It was like I'd woken up on a different planet, but I knew that if I could find the reason, then I could get home. DI... **DCI** Sam Tyler, Greater Manchester Police, signing off.'

Catharsis, they call it.

It's supposed to feel good to talk about it.

I take the tape out of the Dictaphone, and let it drop into the jiffy bag. Right on cue, the admin girl scuttles across. She looks paler than I remembered somehow; greyer. But then, everything does.

'You wanted me to deliver something to psych evaluation division?' she asks, just a vague outline of the pretty girl that I remembered.

'Yeah, thanks.'

'You OK?' asks the silhouette.

'Yeah, yeah. There's this officer. DI Drake. She's collecting... collecting stuff from colleagues who've suffered... **trauma**, you know.

'Anyway, feels good to talk about it actually,' I lie. 'Thanks.'

Not that the lie helps.

The shadow shuffles away. Scared of the freak, probably.

**Beat.**

Suddenly I feel the hairs on the back of my neck stand on end as the sound of my childhood fills the room; the sound of the Doctor's TARDIS tearing open the fabric of the universe and sliding on through.

I spin around just in time to see the Doctor step out of his impossible machine.

'Well if it isn't **Professor X**,' I say wryly.

The Doctor smiles at me. This time, his face is clean shaven and his hair cropped short. 'I see you've been researching your telly history then, now you're... **Back.**'

I take a step towards him. 'But I thought...?' is all I can mutter.

'Yeah, I know what **you** thought and you know what thought did. "Ye have little faith" Sam Tyler; that's half your problem.'

'But how can you be here... and in there,' I say, aggressively tapping at the side of my own head with two fingers, as if I'm pretending to pistol-whip myself with a pretend firearm.

'I'm everywhere, me.'

'So... I **wasn't** in a coma then! Time travel...? Because that's the only way isn't it; the only way it all fits? Unless... Oh God. I am **insane**, aren't I? Oh man... I don't know which way is up anymore.'

'Still. As long as you're happy,' says the Doctor, not without irony.

'That's just it though, isn't it? Being happy, being sad. I'm... I'm nothing. I wake up every morning and I tell myself "I am alive", just like I used to. But then I **used to** feel alive. I used to **hurt**. Now I... I'm not sure that I feel anything anymore.'

'You scared, Sam?' he asks me, flatly.

'I don't fear; I don't *feel*. And when you don't feel, you might as well be-' I stop myself.

The Doctor doesn't reply, a hint of a grimace starting to form on his already tortured brow.

'Tell me this, Doctor. Which world is your world, and which world is mine? Which world is real?'

The Doctor pushes open the right-hand door to his TARDIS, and behind him I can see the pale green glow from what I know should be a TV studio in Cardiff.

'I see a darkness in you, Sam' the Doctor says, simply. I've heard that before.

'Tell me what I should do, Doctor.'

'I might walk in infinity, but I'll be damned if I'm telling you what you already know.'

I sigh, beaten. Nothing feels right anymore.

'I'll tell you somethin' for nothin' though, and it's somethin' you once told me. When you do get home – and I mean *home home*, not this daft old reverie – you make the most of it. Because-'

And with that, he turns away, entering his TARDIS.

**Beat.**

Pausing on the threshold, the Doctor turns back to me one last time. I can almost see the cogs turning in his alien mind. He's been holding something back.

‘Sam. Before you left that place, I know you made someone a promise. And, for what it’s worth, I thought you were the type to keep your promises.’

The Doctor smiles forlornly at me as the TARDIS door closes behind him.

**Beat.**

Three seconds later and suddenly I’m feeling like I’ve woken up from the worst kind of nightmare, but desperately need to fall back to sleep, if only to find out what happens at the end.

Find out what happens to my family.

I always keep my promises.